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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
NATIONAL FOREIGN ASSESSMENT CENTER

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MEMORANDUM

Iraq's Pan-Arab Charter

The Pan-Arab charter proposed last month by Iraqi President Saddam Husayn is aimed at heading off increased superpower involvement in the Middle East and at strengthening Arab nonalignment. Its key provision would prohibit all foreign military bases and facilities on Arab territory and calls for the political and economic isolation of any Arab state that violates this provision. The proposal, however, is still evolving and Arab states that want to retain the option of military cooperation with non-Arab nations will have an opportunity to amend the charter's language.

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Impact on the US

Although the charter is directed against the US and the USSR, it is unlikely to impact evenly on either regional states or the superpowers. The US will probably suffer disproportionately because the charter will be more effective in forestalling or limiting new military cooperation agreements between a superpower and an area state, such as Oman or Somalia, than in reversing a superpower presence already in being, such as that of the USSR in South Yemen.

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This memorandum was prepared by [redacted] of the Near East South Asia Division, Office of Political Analysis as a response to a request from the National Security Council. It was coordinated with the National Intelligence Officer for Near East South Asia. Questions and comments may be addressed to Chief, Near East South Asia Division, [redacted]

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Iraq has already begun to criticize Oman's Sultan Qabus for his receptivity to US overtures. Arab radicals could use the charter, if adopted as an Arab position, as another tool against Oman if Qabus agrees to a more substantial US military presence. The charter might also threaten continued US military access to Bahrain. [redacted]

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Impact on the USSR

A Pan-Arab charter is not likely to harm the existing Soviet military presence in the Mideast. The Iraqi proposal would not effect Soviet forces in non-Arab states such as Ethiopia or Afghanistan. Moreover, South Yemen's Marxist regime, already largely isolated from the rest of the Arab world, is unlikely to be moved by the threat of being formally ostracized. Iraq, nonetheless, would probably try to use the charter against South Yemen because Baghdad's concern over the Soviet presence there is genuine and because failure to act against Aden would compromise Iraq's drive to establish its Arab and nonaligned leadership credentials. The Iraqis also probably hope their proposal would inhibit Soviet attempts to make further inroads in Syria. [redacted]

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Arabs Praise Charter

Initial Arab reaction to the Iraqi plan has been favorable. Twelve Arab states plus the PLO have agreed to attend a summit meeting to discuss the charter. No date or site has been set, but Jordanian King Husayn, an enthusiastic supporter of the charter, said in an interview in early March that he believed a meeting would take place soon in Amman. The King, long a proponent of Arab unity measures, is probably anxious to keep substantial Iraqi economic subsidies flowing to Jordan. [redacted]

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Summit Prospects

Iraq wants the broadest possible participation at a summit [redacted]

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Somali President Siad,

who arrived in Baghdad on 8 March, is probably being wooed with promises of Iraqi military and economic assistance. [redacted]

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The Iraqis do not want a summit on the Pan-Arab charter to end in failure. They are probably prepared to accept changes in their proposal in order to achieve a unified Arab position on limiting foreign involvement in Arab affairs. Spanish Prime Minister Suarez, who visited with Saddam Husayn in Baghdad last month, believes Iraq is sufficiently pragmatic to accommodate the views of "less progressive" Arabs. Saudi Arabia, Morocco, and Tunisia probably favor a less inclusive definition of foreign military facilities so as to permit them some leeway in providing for their own defense. The Iraqis will probably insist on including a ban on foreign bases and combat troops as well as on language setting down a minimum level of economic and political sanctions against states in violation of the charter. [redacted]

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US Options

Stand-by and watch events unfold. It would be unwise to dismiss the charter proposal as empty rhetoric devoid of long-term significance. Iraq stands a good chance of molding a formal consensus limiting military relationships with non-Arab states in much the same way it helped shape the Arab consensus on the Egyptian-Israeli treaty. If Iraq succeeds in pushing through a broad ban on foreign military facilities and forces, moderate Arabs will find themselves locked into a collective position similar to previous Arab summit decisions on recognizing the PLO and punishing Egypt for signing a peace treaty with Israel. [redacted]

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Encourage moderate Arab friends to seek charter modifications. Moderate Arabs want to retain flexibility in their defense policies; we could exploit this and urge them to seek changes in the charter that keep open the maximum possible range of military cooperation with non-Arab states. In doing so they should stress that the military facilities the US has or is seeking are largely "over the horizon" and do not compare with the Soviet presence in the region. The Iraqis will lobby hard for their own version of the charter, but there is give in Baghdad's position if the moderates stand firm. [redacted]

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We should point to the danger of aggression by the Soviets or their clients against area states. We could argue that an effective US military response to a Soviet move against Iran or by South Yemen against Oman or North Yemen would be enhanced if US forces had some prior familiarity with local military facilities. The Saudis, in particular, should be encouraged to work to keep open the option of short visits by non-Arab military forces to local installations. [redacted]

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Still, we should not expect to achieve too much. The uncertainties generated by events in Iran and Afghanistan have so far pushed most area governments to seek protection in Arab unity, rather than to seek external alliances. The charter is consistent with that trend. [redacted]

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